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Report of the Economic and Social Council Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi

Summary

The present report provides an update of the situation in Burundi since the substantive session of the Council in 2005. It highlights positive developments, including the successful holding of elections and the establishment of a duly elected Government and Parliament. While progress has been made on the political and security fronts, the humanitarian situation and development perspectives are of concern. Strong international support is needed to answer basic needs of a still extremely vulnerable population and to ensure the transition from relief to development. In this context, the report calls for further strengthening of the relations of the Government of Burundi with its development partners and for strong support by donors at the conference to be held in September 2006. The report concludes by saying that, in the post-transition phase, the consideration of international assistance to Burundi would be better dealt with by the newly established Peacebuilding Commission.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/33 of 26 July 2005, in which the Council requested the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi to continue to follow closely the humanitarian situation and economic and social conditions, to examine the transition from relief to development in Burundi and the way in which the international community supports the process and to report to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session in 2006. The Council also decided that the work of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group would be reviewed at that session with a view to considering whether to continue its mandate based on the consideration of its report, which should be submitted no later than six weeks before the start of the substantive session of 2006, and on the situation prevailing in Burundi at that time.

2. The present report focuses on developments since the last report of the Group to the Council (E/2005/82), including the status of international donor support to Burundi. Thereafter it presents views on future support to peacebuilding efforts in Burundi.

II. Highlights of the situation in Burundi

3. Since the substantive session of the Council in July 2005, Burundi has moved from being a country in political transition to a country with a duly elected Parliament, Government and President. The electoral process, which covered all levels of local and national elective functions, was successfully conducted from June to September 2005 and a democratically elected Government was installed. Since then, President Nkurunziza and the Government of Burundi have consolidated the authority of the institutions.

4. The Ad Hoc Advisory Group is pleased by the considerable progress made, in line with the electoral calendar originally decided. It considers that these results could not have been achieved without the determination and courage of the people and political leaders of Burundi, and it expresses its deep satisfaction at the positive role played by the international community, particularly the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB), in supporting this process.

5. While this evolution is no doubt positive, the security situation in Burundi continues to be hampered by military clashes between the Government forces and the Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu-Forces nationales de libération (Palipehutu-FNL), which remains outside the peace process, and acts of violence committed by its members against the civilian population. The Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation of Burundi stated to the Group that the leaders of the FNL were increasingly isolated and that the Government had set up sites to host the increasing number of their combatants who are willing to stop fighting. The Group calls for respect for human rights and considers that progress needs to be made to further consolidate peace and to put an end to ongoing violence in some provinces of the country. In view of the presence of FNL in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, continued efforts should be pursued at the regional level. In this respect, the Group encourages both the Government and FNL to seize the opportunity for negotiations with a view to bringing peace to the whole country.

6. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process is moving forward in a satisfactory manner, with around 17,000 adult combatants and 3,000 child soldiers having been demobilized. The Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme, managed by the World Bank, has given reinsertion allowances to former combatants. However, security sector reform remains a major challenge for the authorities, who will need to elaborate a comprehensive plan for the professionalization of the army and the police. This is a prerequisite for increased transparency in their management and a better human rights record. The Government has also launched a campaign for the disarmament of the civilian population and given three weeks for the registration of illegally owned arms. The curfew which had been in effect since 1972, has been lifted.

Humanitarian situation

7. On the humanitarian front, the period under review is marked by the persistence of an acute food crisis. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 20 per cent of the Burundi population is chronically food-insecure and dependent on emergency relief assistance. Heavy dependence of the population on subsistence agriculture, land fragmentation and deterioration of soils are the backdrop of this ongoing crisis. During the period under review, droughts, crop diseases and political insecurity have made the situation worse. In 2006, an estimated 2.2 million Burundians are expected to be in need of food aid, of a total population of 8 million. The Government launched an emergency appeal in fall 2005 and has made additional efforts to provide food and seeds and improve water management. WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international actors are providing vital assistance to the food-insecure population. FAO has indicated that the current pattern of rains during the agricultural season has been satisfactory even though the amount of rainfall in some areas has been below the average needed.

8. This situation has had an impact on the flow of refugees. Towards the end of 2005, there was a steady increase in the number of Burundian returnees from the United Republic of Tanzania, with over 10,000 returnees a month. However, lack of food and growing insecurity have generated an outward flow of Burundians to the United Republic of Tanzania, including some who had recently repatriated to Burundi. Meanwhile, over 20,000 Rwandans crossed into Burundi; many of them have sought refugee status. So far, 1,279 Rwandan applications have been processed, of which only 52 were deemed eligible for refugee status.

9. With an estimated 233,000 Burundians residing in the United Republic of Tanzania and a similar number of "long-term refugees" from 1972 also residing in Tanzania, the return of refugees is expected to increase again. A tripartite agreement between the Government of Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR signed on 21 March 2006 concluded, inter alia, that the time had come to move progressively from facilitation to the promotion of voluntary repatriation. With the ongoing withdrawal of ONUB, resulting in the reduction of its capacity to provide security, logistical and other operational support, the capacity of Burundian and international actors to create the conditions for the proper and sustained return of refugees is a major challenge. However, an estimated 10,000 Burundians who had sought "asylum" in the United Republic of Tanzania since November 2005 have voluntarily and spontaneously returned to Ruyigi province in Burundi in early April,

soon after the tripartite commission agreed to provide food to the population in the area.

Economic and social conditions

10. The Human Development Index of Burundi is 0.378 for 2005, ranking 169 out of 177 countries, an increase compared to the figures for 2003, when the Group was established (0.337, ranking 171 out of 175 countries). The civil war had a devastating impact on the economy of the country, with the gross domestic product (GDP) falling from 1.2 billion in 1991 to 0.69 billion in 2001. With the end of the conflict, economic growth has increased and could reach 6 per cent between 2006 and 2008. Burundi's public finances have also improved with the interim debt relief granted to the country.

11. This positive trend should not obscure the fact that the economy of Burundi remains highly dependent on the fluctuation of commodity prices, as the agricultural sector, particularly coffee, accounts for 50 per cent of GDP and 85 per cent of export earnings. In this post-transition phase, it is therefore essential to create opportunities for public and private investment, develop infrastructure and encourage diversification of activities, including creating opportunities for the processing of agricultural products.

12. When she met the Group, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burundi stressed the efforts made by the Government to improve governance and the management of public finances. An anti-corruption law has been adopted and financial control and audit capacities are strengthened. Another important aspect is decentralization, which requires training and management skills to allow newly elected representatives to perform their duties. The Minister also announced the establishment of a national commission on land and property to prevent and settle conflict of land ownership. The establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission should contribute to enhancing reconciliation within the society and to consolidating peace.

13. In its initial report to the Council, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group stressed that education was a key lever for a sustained post-crisis recovery and encouraged the Government to facilitate access to education for all, including by waiving school fees for indigent children (see E/2004/11, para. 71). The Group was pleased to learn that the elected Government decided to ensure universal and free access to primary education for the school year 2005-2006, which led to a sharp increase in the number of students, boys and girls. ONUB, United Nations agencies and development partners, including countries from the region, have supported the Government to respond to this situation, which reflects the willingness of the people of Burundi to give a better future to their children. The efforts of the Government in this field should be further supported.

III. International donor support to Burundi

14. International assistance to Burundi has increased over the past year. The political evolution of the country towards greater stability and efforts made towards improved management and poverty reduction explain this positive trend.

The Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal process

15. In 2005, funding received for projects and activities under the United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal amounted to US$ 68,451,448 of the required US$ 121,421,099 (revised requirements under the Appeal mid-year review), namely 56 per cent. In addition, contributions were made for food-aid programmes under the Great Lakes regional Appeal and humanitarian projects not included in those appeals (respectively US$ 33 million and US$ 23 million as of October 2005). Humanitarian requirements had increased by 62 per cent compared to previous years, owing to increasing needs to support returnees and engage in community recovery. However, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the implementation of recovery programmes remained poorly funded compared to the agriculture and health sectors. As the Group previously reported to the Council, it is important to go beyond the boundaries of international assistance to provide longer-term support to communities and build capacities for the future. International support to Burundi should therefore be increasingly provided under the prism of the transition from relief to development.

16. The Appeal for 2006, which embraces this approach, requests US$ 129,407,889, to which funding requirements for food aid under the Great Lakes regional Appeal are to be added. As of early April 2006, only 7 per cent of the Burundi Appeal for 2006 was covered. Financial backing and commitment needs to be realized for the UNHCR contingency plan for refugee returns, which amounts to US$ 4,577,000. In February 2006, the executive heads of UNHCR, WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund carried out an unprecedented joint mission to the Great Lakes region, which testifies to increased coordination in the United Nations response to this type of crisis. It is important that these agencies be given the means to control the situation through appropriate action at the regional level.

17. The work of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the field of health deserves to be mentioned, as NGOs expanded their essential package programme in 2005 to cover over 300 health centres, providing them with essential drugs and equipment and health-care service provision and training, including HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, as well as health screening for returning refugees. In addition to the Appeal process, the United Nations Development Programme launched its programme of cooperation with Burundi for the period 2005-2007. The programme, funded at US$ 38 million, will cover three main fields: governance, reintegration/rehabilitation of war victims and poverty alleviation, and HIV/AIDS.

Debt relief

18. In August 2005, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund agreed that Burundi had taken the necessary steps to reach the decision point under the enhanced heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative. The country was granted access to interim debt relief, a position that was endorsed by the African Development Bank. According to the World Bank, Burundi's debt service payments should over time be lowered by about US$ 1.5 billion in nominal terms. To reach the completion point under the HIPC initiative, Burundi will need to continue to follow satisfactorily benchmarks under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility of the International Monetary Fund, implement a poverty reduction strategy for a

full year, which the Government is currently finalizing, and reach results on the announced key structural and social reforms.

19. Given these requirements, the financial needs of the country and the vulnerability of the economy to external shocks, debt relief by itself will not give the Government enough room to manoeuvre to satisfy basic needs of the population and build capacities. Direct financial support continues to be crucial. In January 2006, the World Bank granted US$ 30 million in additional funding for its ongoing public works and employment creation project.

Donor support

20. During the period under review, the Group held two meetings with Antoinette Batumubwira, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Burundi. The meeting was opened to other donor countries, countries of the region, the African Union and the European Commission, as well as several United Nations entities and representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions, in an effort to provide an opportunity for the Government of Burundi to reach out to major partners.

21. The Minister announced that two donor conferences were planned: the first one to discuss a one-year support programme aimed at satisfying the most pressing needs of the people and allowing them to see the dividends of peace, and the second one scheduled for September 2006, with the aim of mobilizing as many donors as possible around the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and its three-year implementation plan, which would be presented at the next Board meeting of the World Bank in May. The Minister stressed the complementarities in the development plans prepared by the Government and the existing articulation between them.

22. Since the Group met the Minister, a conference of development partners was held on 28 February 2006 in Bujumbura, with representatives of major donor countries, countries of the region, the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the European Commission, the Bretton Woods institutions, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the United Nations system led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Burundi. The Government presented an emergency programme for 2006, based on its long-term vision, entitled the "Integral human development of Burundi". The programme has the following strategic priorities: (a) promoting peace and good governance; (b) promoting accelerated economic growth for poverty reduction; (c) promoting basic social services; (d) inserting war victims (*sinistrés*) and other disadvantaged groups in the economy; (e) strengthening the fight against HIV/AIDS; and (f) promoting the participation of women in development.

23. During the conference, participants praised the efforts of the Government to promote stability and expressed their willingness to consolidate progress through increased international assistance. The total amount solicited by the Government, namely US$ 178 million, was covered by the pledges made, partly through new resources and by reallocating funds of ongoing programmes. While some 15 donors

made pledges, European Commission support to Burundi in 2006 represents over a third of the assistance to be provided under the emergency programme .[1]

24. The Government of Burundi has put in place a national committee for aid coordination to increase dialogue with donors. This mechanism will have an important role to play in preparing for the donor conference scheduled in September 2006 to consider the full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which, in the meantime, should be presented to the Bretton Woods institutions. The Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation invited the Group to visit Burundi and assist in mobilizing donors in the preparation of the September conference.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

25. **The Ad Hoc Advisory Group is encouraged and pleased by the important progress made in Burundi since the substantive session of the Council in 2005. Clearly, a page in the history of Burundi has been turned. After more than 10 years of civil war and a challenging transition period, duly elected authorities are building new relations with their development partners, based on strong ownership of the development process and solid interaction with donors. Finalization of the full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper should precipitate opportunities to leverage the success of the February conference for longer-term support. In this context, the Group calls on donors to respond generously to the United Nations Consolidated Appeal Inter-Agency, including funding to the UNHCR contingency plan for refugee returns, and to the Government's requests at the donor conference to be held in September 2006.**

26. **The Group is aware of the challenges remaining to be met to avoid a relapse into conflict, in particular the vulnerability of the population and the structural weaknesses of the economy, including the land issue. It also recognizes that this situation requires the continued commitment of the Government of Burundi supported by the long-term involvement of the international community, which should be commensurate with the needs of the population and appropriate to the regional context.**

27. **The Group recognizes that most of its recommendations to the Council (see E/2004/11 paras. 57-80) have been or are being implemented. The development plans prepared by the Government and presented to donors follow a similar line of action and will contribute to further implementation of these recommendations. The Group encourages Burundi to continue on the course of the reforms agreed in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, while maintaining the spirit of dialogue, consensus and inclusion that made the successful transition of the country possible.**

28. **As ONUB is phasing out, the quality of the relations of Burundi with bilateral and multilateral partners is of utmost importance. This evolution**

[1] Pledges made in euros amounted to €46,366,500 and were made by Belgium (24.8 million), France (4 million), Germany (5 million), Italy (600,000), the Netherlands (4.9 million), the World Bank (10 million) and the IFAD (66,500). Pledges in United States dollars were made by Egypt (166,000), Japan (8.8 million), Morocco (100,000), Nigeria (250,000), the United Kingdom (10 million), the International Monetary Fund (22 million) and the African Development Bank (7 million). Switzerland pledged 7 million Swiss francs.

should be taken into account by the international community. When she met the Group, the Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation expressed interest in having Burundi included in the agenda of the newly established Peacebuilding Commission. Should Burundi request inclusion, the Group considers that it would, indeed gain from the attention and cooperation generated by this new body. While the existence of an ad hoc body has been suitable to follow the transition process in Burundi, consideration of international cooperation in the current situation would be better dealt with by a permanent body like the Peacebuilding Commission. This would allow the international community to further support and accompany the Government and people of Burundi.